

binghamton: video world hollywood?

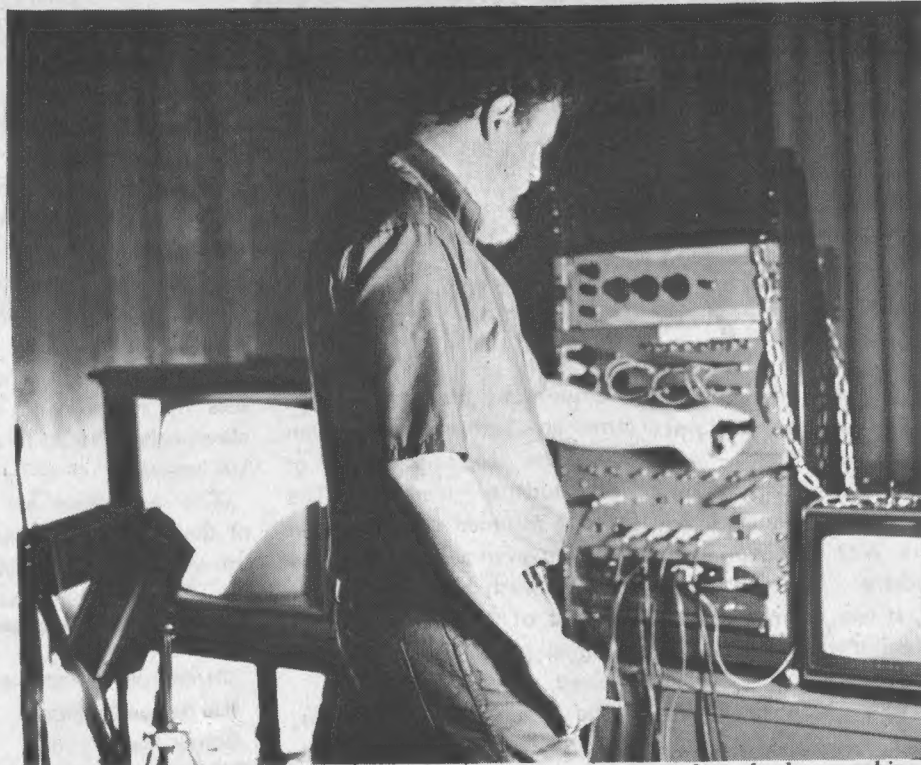
by Karen Rubin

A machine which turns black and white video tapes into color, the third of its kind in the world, was presented by its new owners, the SUNY Binghamton Television Center, on Wednesday.

Attending the unveiling of the Color Video Synthesizer were its inventors, Nam June Paik and Schuyu Abe, the director of the Television Center Ralph Hocking and his assistant Ken Dominick, a New York State Council on the Arts consultant, Russell O'Connor, and Channel 13 (NYC) producer and camera crew.

The machine is programmed to "read" a grey scale and interpret the reflected wavelengths into color. Several tapes running simultaneously can be synthesized together, resulting in superimposed images. Various mixing of color, contrast, intensity, as well as what parts of the color spectrum are used are all at the whim of the Synthesizer's operator. Audio patterns—dots, waves, loops, etc.—can also be superimposed. The operator becomes the artist composing the effects the machine will "read into" the grey scale of the original black and white video tape.

"The machine is so complicated," said Ken Dominick, Hocking's assistant, "that probably only a few people understand how the machine works." Solid state electronics, in his opinion, was one prerequisite to the machine's development. Mass production of solid state is easier, cheaper, and results in a more compact electronics system. Otherwise, the Synthesizer's components would occupy the space of a large room, rather than being the highly portable instrument it is. The Television Center acquired the



—photo by karen rubin

machine chiefly by virtue of their "personal" support over the years, explained Dominick. Hocking met artist Nam June Paik four years ago while Hocking was teaching at Allegheny College.

Paik, currently artist-in-residence at Channel 13, is a Korean TV artist who has been working in the United States for 10 years. His acquaintance with Japanese electronics engineer Schuyu Abe, who directed the electronic development of the machine, has extended over an 11

year period.

Speaking of Abe, a man in his late 30s, Dominick said he is "right in line with oriental miniature electronics and art. His circuit boards are almost art pieces in themselves."

Paik, he said, usually works in abstraction and believes in "art for art's sake."

The machine is ideally suited for this conception of art. Although its color imposition into grey is not random, the range of effects the machine is capable of

makes it difficult for the operator to exert strict control. Reproducibility is almost impossible.

During the presentation of the Synthesizer Wednesday, Channel 13 created a portion for its series on the History of Television dealing with experimental television. Entitled "The Selling of New York," it will be presented some time next week on Channel 13 in New York City.

Video filmmakers are already beginning to journey to Binghamton to borrow the machine. Hollis Frampton, a "well known structuralist" in the video world, spent two days taping off of it.

Although the machine will not be directly "lent-out," Hocking said the Television Center intends to make it accessible for other people's use.

Pipe Dreams March 1, 1972